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**HOW BATMAN COMICS REFLECTS CHANGES IN AMERICAN  
SOCIETY DURING THE GOLDEN AGE OF COMIC BOOKS**

Bachelor's thesis

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*Töö autori allkiri ja kuupäev*

## **PREFACE**

At the beginning of the 20th century, comic books about Batman were becoming more and more popular. Practically from the first comic book, Batman increases people's interest in his character – superhero without superpowers. How could he even be a superhero? The typical man who becomes something bigger than an ordinary human.

Comic books about Batman have suffered many changes through their numerous years of existence. This is a result of the historical and political events that took place at the times of the Golden Age of comic books. In addition, a lot of changes in the comic books were due to the criticism it had faced. This tendency provides a possibility to research about Batman comic books more deeply.

The aim of the research is to study the Batman comic books from the DC universe. To analyse how authors have been transforming comic books from the beginning to 1956.

The research task is to select a specific period of time for the Batman comics, to read those elected comics and inspect all changes from comic books about Batman during the chosen period of time and to identify changes that were influenced by social, political and historical events.

The research paper consists of an introduction, two chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction gives an overview about Batman comics publishing house. In order to get a better understanding, it also shares data about Batman as the protagonist and provides material about a chosen period of time. The first chapter “Events that Influenced the Batman Comics and Detective Comics Issues during the Golden Age” gives an overview of historical, political and social changes and their brief descriptions to better understand the changes in the comic books. The second chapter “How Events Determined the Future of the Batman Comics and Detective Comics Issues during the Golden Age of the Comic Books” identifies and describes the changes in the comic books based on the research in the second part. The conclusion summarizes the results of the research.

<b>PREFACE.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Contents</i>	
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>6</b>
The Golden Age of Comic Books.....	6
The First Comic Book.....	6
Comic Book Ideology.....	7
The Batman's publishing house history.....	7
The Batman.....	7
The Reason for Batman's Formation.....	8
Batman's Conceptions.....	8
Gotham City.....	8
<b>CHAPTER I. EVENTS THAT INFLUENCED THE BATMAN COMICS AND DETECTIVE COMICS ISSUES DURING THE GOLDEN AGE OF COMIC BOOKS.....</b>	<b>10</b>
1.1 World War II.....	10
1.2 Propaganda.....	10
1.3 Seduction of Innocent by Fredric Wertham.....	11
1.4 Comics Code Authority.....	12
1.5 Violence.....	15
1.6 Feminism.....	15
1.7 LGBT.....	15
<b>CHAPTER II. HOW EVENTS DETERMINED THE FUTURE OF THE BATMAN COMICS AND DETECTIVE COMICS ISSUES DURING THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE COMIC BOOKS .....</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1 World War II.....	17
2.2 Propaganda.....	18
2.3 Seduction of Innocents.....	20
2.4 Homosexuality in Batman Comics.....	20
2.5 Violence.....	21
2.6 Feminism.....	22
2.7 Comics Code Authority.....	23
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>26</b>
Primary sources.....	26

Secondary sources.....	26
<b>APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>31</b>
Appendix 1. Propaganda. Detective Comics Issue #61.....	31
Appendix 2. Propaganda. Detective Comics Issue #5.....	32
Appendix 3. Propaganda. Batman Comics Issue #15.....	33
Appendix 4. Propaganda. Batman Comics Issue #17.....	34
Appendix 5. Propaganda. Batman Comics Issue #18.....	35
Appendix 6. Propaganda. Batman Comics Issue #12.....	36
Appendix 7. Propaganda. Batman Comics Issue #28.....	37

## **INTRODUCTION**

The period of time during the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s was chosen for the current research because it is period of time, when comic books about Batman started to be published. It is called the Golden Age of the comic books.

### **The Golden Age of Comic Books**

There are four names for certain periods of time for comic books. First one is the Golden Age, second age is Silver, then Bronze and the final age is Modern or Iron Age (Bryant, 2010: 12)

The Golden Age of the comic books starts in June 1938 and ends in the mid-1950s. For DC (publishing house of the comics about Batman) the Golden Age was the age of four superhero characters: Superman, who appears in Action Comics issue #1, in June of 1938; Batman, first appearance of him was in Detective Comics issue #27, in 1939; Flash in Flash Comics issue #1, in 1940 and Wonder Woman in issue #8 of All Star Comics, in 1941 (Booker, 2010).

Why is it called the Golden Age of the comic books? “A golden age is a period of time during which a very high level of achievement is reached in a particular field of activity, especially in art or literature” (Collins Dictionary, 2020).

### **The First Comic Book**

The first American comic book – Famous Funnies – was published in 1934. . It was 10-cent comic book, which comes out each month. By the end of the 19th century comic strips in newspapers attracted huge attention in majority of people. Many publishers realised, that with this kind of literature it is possible to earn tremendous amount of money. One of the publishers, William Randolph, started to change comic book format, making them in hardcover. There were a variety of the different comic books, black and white, and full-coloured strips. In order to increase popularity authors started to make stories longer. At the beginning of the Golden Age of comic books, Famous Funnies had already released 46 issues. Golden Age has started new tendency in comic book industry – superheroes, but Famous Funny did not want to give up so easily. Editors changed their stories more in a fiction-oriented way and added dramatical effects. On the final cover of the Famous Funnies is television, which at that times increases popularity above books.

Famous Funnies was a standard format for the rest of the comic books (Coletta, 2010: 195-197).

### **Comic Book Ideology**

What is ideology? David Croteau (Media and Ideology, 2002) suggests that ideology is a concept of worldview, belief system and values. In other words, ideology is a strong manipulative tool to describe events in the world and how we suppose to understand them.

Can we say that comic books are manipulative? Yes, comic books reflect social situation in the country in their catching-eye pages, with their unique manner - more colourful pictures with strong phrases that will get your attention (Phillips, Strobl, 2013).

The differences between superhero villains usually show what exactly is happening in the real world. For example, in Batman Comics we can see that Batman's antagonists are gangsters and during World War II there are more Nazi on the pages.

### **The Batman's publishing house history**

From the beginning there were no DC (Detective Comics) Comics company but only National Allied Publications. It was founded in 1934 by Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson. He was a pulp writer and businessman. Wheeler was interested in developing his own company but he needed money to succeed. He found a help from Harry Donnenfeld and Jack Liebowitz, they were distributors of Independent News magazine. Eventually, in 1937, three of them opened Detective Comics Inc. and presented the first issue. Later, Wheeler could not manage to pay his debts to others shareholders and sold out his ownership in Detective Comics Inc. and National Allied Publications.

In 1940 Donnenfeld and Liebowitz decided to combine two companies - Detective Inc. and National Allied Publications into one publishing house - National Comics; but later they got back to Detective Comics, in other word, DC. Since that day to present times everyone in the world has called it DC (Booker, 2010).

### **The Batman**

Batman is an ordinary person and his name is Bruce Wayne. He is the CEO of Wayne Enterprises. At night he is the city protector and crimefighter and during the rest of the

day, he is a millionaire who loves to visit lush events, parties and charity evenings. He lives in the family mansion and loves to spend money on extravagant vehicles.

### **The Reason for Batman's Formation**

On January the 17<sup>th</sup> in 1939, Robert Kane (well-known as - Bob Kane) - an American comic book writer and artist, asked the editor of DC Comics – Vincent Sullivan – “How much Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster earn for comic books about the Superman?”. Vincent Sullivan answered, that “800 bucks per week” (Shorohova, 2016). This huge amount of money attracted Bob Kane and he got an idea – to make a superhero which could compare with Superman. For Vincent Sullivan, it was a good opportunity because, at that time, DC Comic needed a new hero - to increase people's interest in their publishing house.

### **Batman's Conceptions**

Not everyone knows that Batman's character conception has a minimum of three versions.

The first one tells that Batman was made by Bob Kane based on the alien race from the comic book about another superhero - Flash Gordon (Shorohova, 2016).

The second version that Bob Kane gets his inspiration from Leonardo da Vinci's work – the flying machine (ibid). The flying machine design was based on the anatomy of birds and bats. “In his drawings, he used bats wings as the starting point as he saw them as not being as heavy because of the nature of the membrane they have on their wings” (LeonardodaVinci, 2019).

According to the third version, a few parts of the Batman's personality were taken from Zorro and Sherlock Holmes. The visual design of a mysterious Zorro helped Bruce Wayne to become the Batman at night. The phenomenal deduction abilities of Sherlock Holmes provided a high IQ for Batman, which helps the protagonist to be a superhero without superpowers but with many technical devices, vehicles and IT technologies. (Shorohova, 2016)

### **Gotham City**

Gotham is a fictional city, where Batman lives. DC Comics do not use real cities but only use their imagination to create them. Gotham city combined in itself the minimum of two cities of the United States of America – New York and Chicago. In the



beginning, Gotham's city name was New York but in the comic book "Batman Issue 4" we can see a newspaper with the title "Gotham City Gazette", starting from page 6 of this comic book, Gotham city has began to exist.

In the comic book "Batman: Year One" we can see similarities from New York's the 42 street – the location with bright and kaleidoscopic signs on each building. Also in "Detective Comics Issue 80", there is the name of the building - Tarnegie Hall, which is the direct reference to the Carnegie Hall in New York City.

Gotham city has always has been connected with crime, gangs, underworld, and violation. This leads us to the second city – Chicago, which has usually been associated with criminality.

The combination of two cities makes Gotham so unusual place. Where else should most mysterious superhero of our generation be born? He was born here as a human and also as a person who wants to guard this city. Gotham took from Batman the most precious thing in childhood – his parents – and gave him the reason to live showing him the purpose – and had shown his purpose – to save Gotham from the malfeasance. (ComicVine, 2019)

### **History of Becoming Batman**

It is considered that Bruce parents' death was the reason for him to become Batman. This happened in April 1929, in Gotham city. After spending some time in the cinema, watching "The Mark of Zorro", the Wayne family decided to go home through the park. He is a little boy, constantly talking about the movie and being so excited about it, together with his parents, who were concerned about their city, especially about an infinite number of crime, which dis-improved the situation on the streets. Martha and Tom were having a conversation, that could help to make streets better:

"I'll make some calls...send some checks" – said Tom to his wife. "Tom, there's someone following us!" – Martha said and two gunshots were maiden. The Wayne family no longer have two members - Tom and Martha Wayne were dead. "Tell me, kid...you ever dance with the devil by the pale moonlight?" With these words, killers have gone, while a little boy was blubbering on his knees in a pool of blood (Batman Detective issue #27, 2003: 4-5).

"One moment...Two bullets...One tragedy...Two deaths...And one life is altered forever" (Batman Detective issue #27, 2003: 6).

## **CHAPTER I. EVENTS THAT INFLUENCED THE BATMAN COMICS AND DETECTIVE COMICS ISSUES DURING THE GOLDEN AGE OF COMIC BOOKS**

During the Golden Age of comic books, there were many events that affected the Batman comic books issues. Events, such as - World War II and Cold War; Book of the American psychiatrist Fredric Wertham “Seduction of Innocent”, which leads to another event - the Comics Code Authority.

All of these events lead to another actions, like propaganda, violence, feminism movement and infringement of right of the LGBT society.

### **World War II**

World War II, or the Second World War starts on the 1st of September in 1939 and lasts 6 years and 1 day. The final date of the War is 2nd September, 1945. It was a global War between Axis Powers, Soviet Union and Anti-Hitler coalition (Wikipedia, 2020)

For Axis Powers there were three main countries, which on the 27th of September, in 1940 made an agreement - Tripartite Pact, also known as Berlin Pact. The Berlin Pact was a defensive military alliance between Germany, Italy and Japan. Later, in 1940 and 1941, into alliance were assembled 5 more countries - Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Slovakia. Two days later, by joining to Axis Powers, Yugoslavia provoked coup d’etat and eventually became as new independent country – Croatia (ibid.).

Anti-Hitler coalition, or Allies of World War II - it was an alliance of countries, that stands against Nazi Party. In Anti-Hitler coalition were Poland, France, Great Britain and others satellites. After Japan attacked the USA on December 7, in 1941 to coalition joined China and the USA. Correctly, China and the USA were not in state of war, they were more “non-combatant allies”, helping economically and by sending their military forces (ibid.).

### **Propaganda**

What is propaganda? As stated in the book “Propaganda and Persuasion” by Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell (2012), “Propaganda is a form of communication that attempts to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.

Persuasion is interactive and attempts to satisfy the needs of both persuader and persuadee“.

The primary method of using propaganda is the mass media. According to Anthony R. Pratkanis and Elliot Aranson (2001):

“In the United States, there are 1,449 television stations and four major networks, 10,379 radio stations, 1,509 daily newspapers and 7,047 weekly newspapers, more than 17,000 magazines and newsletters, and nine major film studios. Americans have ample opportunity to consume mass media messages, and consume they do. Each year the typical American watches 1,550 hours of TV, listens to 1,160 hours of radio on one of 530 million radio sets, and spends 180 hours reading 94 pounds of newspapers and 110 hours reading magazines. Each year an American has the opportunity to read more than 50,000 new books in print. More than half of our waking hours are spent with the mass media ... Americans are exposed to 18 billion magazine and newspaper ads, 2.6 million radio commercials, 300,000 TV commercials, 500,000 billboards, and 40 million pieces of direct mail. With 6% of the world's population, the United States consumes 57% of the world's advertising. Manufacturers spend more than \$165 billion a year on advertising...”

The Office of War Information was created during the period of World War II. It was established by the USA President - Franklin D. Roosevelt, in 1942.

“The United States Office of War Information (OWI) was a U.S. government agency created during World War II to consolidate government information services. It operated from June 1942 until September 1945. It coordinated the release of war news for domestic use, and, using posters and radio broadcasts, worked to promote patriotism, warned about foreign spies and attempted to recruit women into war work. The office also established an overseas branch which launched a large scale information and propaganda campaign abroad” (Academic Dictionaries and Encyclopedias, 2019).

It is clear that in the mid-1930s, mass media was less developed but still mass media played a huge role in spreading information. Comic books are one of the mass media tools and were very popular at that time among different kind of people, which makes propaganda more easier to reach people.

### **Seduction of Innocent by Fredric Wertham**

Fredric Wertham was a German-American psychiatrist who published his book “Seduction of innocent” on April 19, in 1954.

“Seduction of innocent” has a strong message that comic books are very dangerous for children. For example, comics have violence - their favourite superheroes fight the crime and they do not hesitate to use all the might they have and sometimes using not ordinary ways of punishment. Wertham also saw hidden lesbian/gay propaganda on the certain pages of comic books and inappropriate woman’s behaviour, where women are more like males.

The book became a bestseller. Worried parents took everything very seriously and book motivated parents to create censorship. Even The Congress of the United States was involved into comic books industry and later, to prevent a negative influence of comic books, the Comic Code Authority was formed.

### **Comics Code Authority**

Comics Code was created in 1954 by the Comics Magazine Association of America to regulate comic books publications. There was no law for Code; it was voluntary.

Below are rules of the Comics Code Authority, that have changed the way of comic books writing.

“Code for Editorial Matter

#### **General Standards Part A**

1. Crimes shall never be presented in such a way as to create sympathy for the criminal, to promote distrust of the forces of law and justice, or to inspire others with a desire to imitate criminals.
2. No comics shall explicitly present the unique details and methods of a crime.
3. Policemen, judges, government officials and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority.
4. If crime is depicted it shall be as a sordid and unpleasant activity.
5. Criminals shall not be presented so as to be rendered glamorous or to occupy a position which creates a desire for emulation.
6. In every instance good shall triumph over evil and the criminal punished for his misdeeds.
7. Scenes of excessive violence shall be prohibited. Scenes of brutal torture, excessive and unnecessary knife and gun play, physical agony, gory and gruesome crime shall be eliminated.
8. No unique or unusual methods of concealing weapons shall be shown.
9. Instances of law enforcement officers dying as a result of a criminal's activities should be discouraged.
10. The crime of kidnapping shall never be portrayed in any detail, nor shall any profit accrue to the abductor or kidnapper. The criminal or the kidnapper must be punished in every case.
11. The letters of the word "Crime" on a comics magazine cover shall never be appreciably greater in dimension than the other words contained in the title. The word "crime" shall never appear alone on a cover.

12. Restraint in the use of the word "crime" in titles or subtitles should be exercised.

#### General Standards Part B

1. No comic magazine shall use the word horror or terror in its title.
2. All scenes of horror, excessive bloodshed, gory or gruesome crimes, depravity, lust, sadism, masochism shall not be permitted.
3. All lurid, unsavoury, gruesome illustrations shall be eliminated.
4. Inclusion of stories dealing with evil shall be used or shall be published only where the intent is to illustrate a moral issue and in no case shall evil be presented alluringly nor so as to injure the sensibilities of the reader.
5. Scenes dealing with, or instruments associated with walking dead, torture, vampires and vampirism, ghouls, cannibalism and werewolfism are prohibited.

#### General Standards Part C

All elements or techniques not specifically mentioned herein, but which are contrary to the spirit and intent of the Code, and are considered violations of good taste or decency, shall be prohibited

#### Dialogue

1. Profanity, obscenity, smut, vulgarity, or words or symbols which have acquired undesirable meanings are forbidden.
2. Special precautions to avoid references to physical afflictions or deformities shall be taken.
3. Although slang and colloquialisms are acceptable, excessive use should be discouraged and wherever possible good grammar shall be employed.

#### Religion

Ridicule or attack on any religious or racial group is never permissible.

#### Costume

1. Nudity in any form is prohibited, as is indecent or undue exposure.
2. Suggestive and salacious illustration or suggestive posture is unacceptable.
3. All characters shall be depicted in dress reasonably acceptable to society.
4. Females shall be drawn realistically without exaggeration of any physical qualities.

NOTE: It should be recognized that all prohibitions dealing with costume, dialogue or artwork applies as specifically to the cover of a comic magazine as they do to the contents.

#### Marriage and Sex

1. Divorce shall not be treated humorously nor represented as desirable.
2. Illicit sex relations are neither to be hinted at nor portrayed. Violent love scenes as well as sexual abnormalities are unacceptable.
3. Respect for parents, the moral code, and for honourable behaviour shall be fostered. A sympathetic understanding of the problems of love is not a license for morbid distortion.
4. The treatment of love-romance stories shall emphasize the value of the home and the sanctity of marriage.
5. Passion or romantic interest shall never be treated in such a way as to stimulate the lower and baser emotions.
7. Sex perversion or any inference (sic) to same is strictly forbidden.

#### Code for Advertising Matter

These regulations are applicable to all magazines published by the members of the Comics Magazine Association of America, Inc. Good taste shall be the guiding principle in the acceptance of advertising.

1. Liquor and tobacco advertising is not acceptable.
2. Advertisement of sex or sex instruction books are unacceptable.
3. The sale of picture postcards, "pin-ups" "art studies," or any other reproduction of nude or semi-nude figures is prohibited.
4. Advertising for the sale of knives, concealable weapons or realistic gun facsimiles is prohibited.
5. Advertising for the sale of fireworks is prohibited.
6. Advertising dealing with the sale of gambling equipment or printed matter dealing with gambling shall not be accepted.
7. Nudity with meretricious purpose and salacious posture shall not be permitted in the advertising of any product; clothed figures shall never be presented in such a way as to be offensive or contrary to good taste or morals.
8. To the best of his ability, each publisher shall ascertain that all statements made in advertisements conform to fact and avoid misinterpretation.

9. Advertisement of medical, health, or toiletry products of questionable nature are to be rejected. Advertisements for medical, health or toiletry products endorsed by the American Medical Association, or the American Dental Association, shall be deemed acceptable if they conform with all other conditions of the Advertising Code “(Comics Code, 1954)

## **Violence**

What is violence? According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2019), violence is - “the use of physical force so as to injure, abuse, damage, or destroy”. But how ordinary comics can damage? Psychologically? In the book “Understanding Comics” (1993), written by Scott McCloud, he compares violence in the comic books with violence on television. Television enchains people “continuously 24 times per second” (ibid.), while in comics books man only sees fragmented actions. For example, there are two fragments. In the first fragment, there are a woman and man, who is chasing her in the dark backstreet. In the next fragment a woman screams and man comes out from backstreet alone, holding a knife with blood on it. You can not see what is really happened in that period of time. There is only space between those frames. Comics books’ connoisseurs call it “the gutter”. The blank space gathering two separate images into one whole idea. All violence is in people’s minds (McCloud, 1993: 60-72).

## **Feminism**

Feminism is “the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state “(Cambridge Dictionary, 2020)

## **LGBT**

LGBT - “abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020)

In the period of mid-1930s to mid-1950s, in the USA there was no actual LGBT Society, instead there was The Mattachine Society. It was founded by Harry Hay, in 1950. A small group of 5 men wanted to support gay authority. Along with lesbian movement (lesbian organization), The Mattachine Society was one of the first American organizations that wanted to defend rights of homosexuals (Foote, 2011).

In the 1940s and 1950s gays and lesbians were hiding, their meeting places became more secretive. In order to hide your orientation, people pretended to be straight and sometimes got married, to live normal life (George Chauncey, 1994).



## **CHAPTER II. HOW EVENTS DETERMINED THE FUTURE OF THE BATMAN COMICS AND DETECTIVE COMICS ISSUES DURING THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE COMIC BOOKS**

### **World War II**

The year 1941, World War Two - The women of the United States of America just sent their husbands to the war in Europe, and children stayed without their fathers. The World War II period was a hard time for each person in the world and in order to forget about cruelty and to distract children, the authors of the Batman comic book created a new villain - Penguin. He is funny, clumsy; readers could laugh at him and get new imagination about evil. Considering the first years of cruel issues, appearing of this kind of enemy like Penguin, makes it clear that authors understand the situation in the country and they are trying to make the story more appropriate for children audience by using Penguin character as a Socratic irony of the evil image. The irony comes in that Cobblepot (Penguin) is too gawky and hilarious to be evil and he does not look like he is a very smart person but in reality, he is very intelligent and a good strategist.

Before the Second World War, the issues of comic books about Batman were full of fights with gangsters.

Gangster – “is a criminal who is a member of a gang” (Wikipedia, 2020)

World War II influenced each person on the planet and authors of comic books about Batman not an exception, they added new kind of villains in the comic books - the Nazis.

The Nazis - “a member of the National Socialist (German Workers') Party, led by Adolf Hitler, which controlled Germany from 1933 to 1945 (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020).

In Detective Comics issue # 78, authors added something new in the plot of Batman and Robin's adventures - in the first story of the issue #78, they have a fight with Nazi. Stories with defending people from Germans uplifting the spirit of the American citizens. Episode started with Robin doing his history homework and this inspires Batman to do something for his country - to hire people, who can sell war bonds in costumes of an American famous historical figures. Everything was fine until Nazi came. They wanted to prevent war bonds selling. Batman, Robin and the group of people in the costumes of an American well-known characters defeated Germans.

In Batman comics there are a few stories, where the Nazi were involved: issues #15, #19 and #26. In issues #15 and #19 stories where you can clearly see that there are fighting with Nazi; issue #15 contains a story about future, what would happened when World War II ends. There are two possibilities: when people surrendered and did not try to stand against German army; and when they gave a fight: “and now let us gear our imagination to another kind of future for America - a future in which the people stand solidly behind fighting forces second to none on the face of the earth!” (Batman issue #15, 1943)

Batman comics issue #19 a simple story, where Nazi fooled the people of the Atlantis. Authors wanted to show how unpleasant and manipulative could be soldiers of German army.

Batman comics issue #26; In this episode, we can read about Batman’s science fiction adventure. The story about the future - the year 3000, aliens from planet Saturn tried to put down our planet. The commander of Saturn’s forces was psychotic Saturnian Fura who in the real controlled the army of robots, not his compatriots. What is the connection with Nazi? Name of the Saturnians leader was Fura, which is consonant to Adolf Hitler’s rank – Führer (Manning, 2017: 32)

World War Two was a painful event for authors and for every person in the world; to cheer up the United States of America writers continues to add victorious moments over Nazi and Hitler.

## **Propaganda**

After the attack on Pearl Harbor on the 7th of December, in 1941, Batman’s character begins to change. Years of the World War II in the USA consist a lot of patriotism propaganda. Image of Batman becomes patriotic. More frequently on the pages of comic books, Batman salutes to soldiers (Detective comics issue #61: 41, promo of the next World’s Finest comics). He becomes closer to the American nation. Authors wanted to show their respect and faith in American soldiers.<sup>1</sup>

Patriotism - “love of one country”, when people are eager to sacrifice something, to make their country better and help it to progress (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2009).

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<sup>1</sup> Appendices 1, 2

On the cover of the Batman comic's issue #15, you can find Batman and Robin shooting German army (Gukov, 2017) - "Keep those bullets flying! Keep on buying war bonds and stamps!" (Batman comics issue 15, 1943)<sup>2</sup>

The cover of the issue #17 of Batman comics has the huge bald eagle on it, while Batman and Robin are riding him. Meantime on the background are flying planes of the American army.<sup>3</sup>

"The Bald Eagle (*haliaeetus leucocephalus*) is the National Bird of USA. The Bald Eagle was adopted as the National Bird of United States in 1782. The Bald Eagle symbolizes strength, courage, freedom and immortality. The Bald Eagle is represented in many important places including Great Seal, One-dollar bill, Federal agency seals and President's flag." (Hubpages, 2012)

Batman issue #18 front cover with tagline "Insure the 4th of July" in the center is exploding fireworks, surrounded by three allies of Axis Power - Adolf Hitler, Hideki Tojo and Benito Mussolini. This picture Represents dilution of the Axis Powers in 1943. (B. Bonwetsch, 2008: vol.2).<sup>4</sup>

The front cover of the issues #12, 15, 17 and 18 of Batman comics have one common slogan: "Buy war bonds and stamps!"<sup>5</sup>

War bonds are "debt securities issued by a government to finance military operations and other expenditure in times of war" (Wikipedia, 2019) and war stamps were made by the same reasons as war bonds - to help American citizens participate in World War II by buying stamps and thereby finance American army.

The front cover of the Batman comic's issue #28 has no agitations to buy war bonds or stamps; it is all about American Red Cross.<sup>6</sup>

"The American Red Cross involvement in World War II preceded the entrance of the United States into the conflict. When hostilities began in Europe in 1939, the Red Cross became the chief provider of relief supplies for the civilian victims of conflict distributed by the Geneva-based International Red Cross Committee. In February 1941, the Red Cross responded to a request by the U.S. government to begin a Blood Donor Service to produce lifesaving plasma for the armed forces in anticipation of America's entry into the war. After the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the Red Cross quickly mobilized a volunteer and staff force to fulfill the mandates of its 1905 congressional charter requiring that the organization "furnish volunteer aid to the sick and wounded of armies in time of war" and to "act in matters of voluntary relief and in accord with the military and naval authorities as a medium of communication between the people of the United States of America and their Army and Navy" (World War II and the American Red Cross)

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<sup>2</sup> Appendix 3

<sup>3</sup> Appendix 4

<sup>4</sup> Appendix 5

<sup>5</sup> Appendices 3-6

<sup>6</sup> Appendix 7

On the front cover is a small slogan - “Red Cross needs your support!”, for more effect the cover colour is red.

The main role of propaganda is to inspire people, to draw their attention to the problem and make them believe that they can do it by themselves. Those covers have a call to actions and encourage people, especially children who think if Batman does it, I can be like him, Batman is my hero, he fights Nazi...I can help him. Batman as an example for children plays a huge role in propaganda. For children he is someone that they admire (E. Berneys, 2010).

### **Seduction of Innocents**

This book has many statements about how comics deprave young society. To start with, F. Wertham considers the image of supermen “unhygienic”. The superhuman is “law unto himself”. Wertham said that comics influenced youth society to think that they were imperfect compared to superhero; children could not “overcome feelings of inferiority” because they were “sidetracked by the fancied short-cuts of superman powers” (Wertham, 1954)

### **Homosexuality in Batman Comics**

F. Wertham finds homosexual undertone in relationship between Batman and Robin:

“Only someone ignorant of the fundamentals of psychiatry and of the psychopathology of sex can fail to realize a subtle atmosphere of homoerotism which pervades the adventures of the mature "Batman" and his young friend "Robin."

“...so the Batman type of story helps to fixate homoerotic tendencies by suggesting the form of an adolescent-with-adult or Ganymede-Zeus type of love-relationship.”

Sometimes Wertham statements are too childish and it is very suspicious, that psychiatrist could write this way:

“They are Bruce Wayne and "Dick" Gray- son”

Writer also describes Batman and Robin’s everyday life as a perfect gay life. Wertham called it “dream of two homosexuals leaving together” – sometimes Bruce Wayne resting in his bed, collar open and Robin is sitting next to him, while Bruce Wayne puts his hand on Robin’s hand.

Those statements are too homophobic; even parsing Robin’s real name into male genitals. Also F. Wertham states that Robin’s image is too “ephebic” and that Robin’s superhero uniform is inappropriate – “shown in his uniform with bare legs”.

Additionally, Robin's posture – "he often stands with his legs spread, the genital region discreetly evident". Furthermore Wertham makes accents on that fact that "there no decent, attractive, successful women". If there is a woman, she usually is a villain.

"The Batman type of story may stimulate children to homosexual fantasies, of the nature of which they may be unconscious. In adolescents who realize it they may give added stimulation and reinforcement"

"The normal concept for a boy is to wish to become a man, not a superman, and to live with a girl rather than with a superheroic he-man." (Wertham, 1954)

The above-mentioned quotes make authors to add more female personage. The first female-hero appeared in Detective Comics issue #233 - Batwoman. DC writers started to change the concept of Batman's family. Apparently, authors thought, that if they add more characters into Batman's family, this would erase homosexual image from Batman and Robin. Also in Batman comic issue #92 we can find new member of Batman's team - Bat-hound; it is a dog, who helps Batman and Robin fight the crime.

## **Violence**

F. Wertham stated:

"Crime comic books represented about one tenth of the total of all comic books in 1946-1947. In 1948-1949 they increased to one third of the total. By 1949 comic books featuring crime, violence and sadism made up over one half of the industry. By 1954 they form the vast majority of all comic books."

"The trouble is that the "good" comic books are snowed under by those which glorify violence, crime and sadism."

From the first episodes, comic books about Batman were considered as a violent comics. There were scenes, where Batman uses different kinds of armament to punish criminals, fighting and in the first issues Batman kills people. For example, in the issue #27 of the Detective Comics, there is an enemy - Striker, in order to defend himself, Batman kicked him and dropped into acid. At that time, Batman did not have his famous rule "do not kill"; he does not understand how life is precious, would it be an ally or an enemy. Later, authors will add Batman's rule "do not kill", but it would not cover a vampire's life because according to Batman - vampires are already dead.

In 1940 a new artist – Jerry Robinson joins the developer's team. He was a creator of an idea to add Robin - Batman's mate. Jerry Robinson is a huge fan of legends about Robin Hood, an idea to name Batman's ally - Robin comes from that. Also, for children, Robin's name would remind Robin Hood - the hero, who helped poor people (Diaz, 2017). The first appearance of Robin was in the Detective Comics Issue #38. By adding a little boy into stories about Batman, authors would decrease

cruelty and this hero is closer to readers than Batman; Robin is an ordinary boy, who follows his ideal, as the comic book readers.

After F. Wertham published his book, he started the new comic book era - where each comics suppose to be checked by Comic Code Authority.

Also, the level of violence decreased: all cruelness of Batman's villains was gone. Batman's adventures now become more science-fictional - Batman started to investigate intergalactic cases.

### **Feminism**

"...It seemed to me . . . that the comics worst offense was their blood-curdling masculinity . . . not even girls want to be girls so long as our feminine archetype lacks force, strength. . . . Women's strong qualities have become despised because of their weak ones." (Marston, 1943)

As many times comic books writers have tried to add memorable and strong female personage into the comic books, as much society saw in that something strange and inappropriate:

"Women in the stories are placed on an equal footing with men and indulge in the same type of activities. They are generally aggressive and have positions which carry responsibility. Male heroes predominate but to a large extent even these are essentially unsexed creatures. The men and women have secondary sexual mannerisms, but in their relationship to each other they are de-sexed." (F. Wertham, 1954)

In the first year of Batman comic books publications, there is no female iconic character, neither good nor evil. To multiply comic book selling and attract women to read, authors decided to add a new female character - Catwoman. The first appearance was in "Batman Issue 1"- the first individual comic book of the Batman's character. Catwoman renews the reader's interest - both women and men; but a new villain did not stay for a long time. It has a minimum of two reasons:

The first reason is - World War Two. At that period of time, many women in America sent their husbands to the war and stayed in the United States to raise children, to work and to keep household to themselves. To cheer up women, authors of DC released another comic book with a new hero - Wonder Women. The image of strong and brave women was more pleasant than an image of a thief and swindler. In Comparison with Wonder Woman, Catwoman was very slutty and was a femme fatale.

This concept was accepted without good feedback, which did not allow Catwoman to appear more.

The second reason is - feminism, which started in 1930 and ended at the time of the Great American Depression. But World War Two gave a chance to bring feminism back again. By adding an image of femme fatale woman, authors thought that this would support the idea of feminism. However, releasing at the same time the great figure of courageous and independent Wonder Woman spoiled the new Batman's antagonist.

The new attempt to add female characters into the Batman's story were Batwoman and Batgirl. These characters were similar to Batman and Robin, but they fully revealed their potential in the Silver Age of comic books. It was a new start for feminism to appear on the pages of Batman and Detective comics.

### **Comics Code Authority**

As Comic Code Authority begins its existence, in Batman and Detective comics the family concept began to be traced more and more:

“Marriage and Sex:

.....

4. The treatment of love-romance stories shall emphasize the value of the home and the sanctity of marriage. (Comic Code Authority, 1954) “

Comic Code decreased violence, the details of crimes become less detailed and villains became more awkward. Comic books lost their individuality and interesting stories, they have become more boring.

## CONCLUSION

The comic books have always been very popular among all ages. Their plot attracts different kinds of people by interesting stories, variation of characters, with unpretentious sentences and beautiful drawings. Every person could find something interesting for yourself. There are various themes that comic books are written about: detective, horror, science-fictional, comedy and etc.

In order to increase the popularity, comic book authors create plot similarly to what happens in the world. This kind of writing develops interest for the readers. Since comics are created for different ages, they can cover topics for both adults and children.

The hypothesis of this research is - changes in plot and with characters in the comic books about Batman during the Golden Age of the comic books, are connected with social, political and historical events.

Chapter I presents an information about how World War II, popularity of propaganda, criticism and feminism movement have influenced on the characters, plot and the theme of the comic books about Batman during the Golden Age. It gives a better understanding for the following changes in comics.

Chapter II explains how mentioned events have affected comics and what changes were made in comic books about Batman. It also contains examples from the comic books issues with appendices.

The conducted investigation and analysis make it possible to draw a conclusion that authors of the comic books about Batman have used social, political and historical events that have happened during the Golden Age of the comic books, to change stories, characters and theme in the comic books issues about Batman.



## SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Koomiksid on alati olnud igas vanuses väga populaarsed. Nende süžee meelitab erinevaid inimesi huvitavate lugude, tegelaskujude variatsioonide, lihtsate lausete ja kaunite jooniste abil. Iga inimene võis leida enda jaoks midagi huvitavat. Koomiksid võivad jagada erinevateks žanrideks: detektiiv, õudus, ulme, komöödia jms.

Populaarsuse suurendamiseks koomiksiautorid loovad süžee sarnaselt maailmas toimuvaga. Selline kirjutamine arendab lugejate huvi. Kuna koomiksid on loodud erinevatele vanustele, võivad need hõlmata teemasid nii täiskasvanutele kui ka lastele.

Selle uurimistöö hüpotees on – Batmani-teemaliste koomiksiste süžee ja tegelaskujude muutused, koomiksiste Kuldajal, on seotud sotsiaalsete, poliitiliste ja ajalooliste sündmustega.

I peatükis tutvustatakse teavet selle kohta, kuidas II maailmasõda, propaganda populaarsus, kriitika ja feminismiliikumine on mõjutanud Batmanit käsitlevate koomiksiste tegelasi, süžeed ja teemat Kuldajal. See annab parema ülevaate järgmistest koomiksimuudatustest.

II peatükis selgitatakse, kuidas mainitud sündmused on koomiksit mõjutanud ja milliseid muudatusi tehti Batmani käsitlevates koomiksiraamatutes. See sisaldab ka näiteid koomiksiste väljaannetest koos lisadega.

Läbiviidud uurimine ja analüüs võimaldab teha järelduse, et Batmani-alaste koomiksiste autorid on koomiksiste lugude, tegelaste ja teema muutmiseks kasutanud koomiksiste Kuldajastu ajal aset leidnud sotsiaalseid, poliitilisi ja ajaloolisi sündmusi.

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## APPENDICES


### Appendix 1. Propaganda. Detective Comics Issue #61: 41

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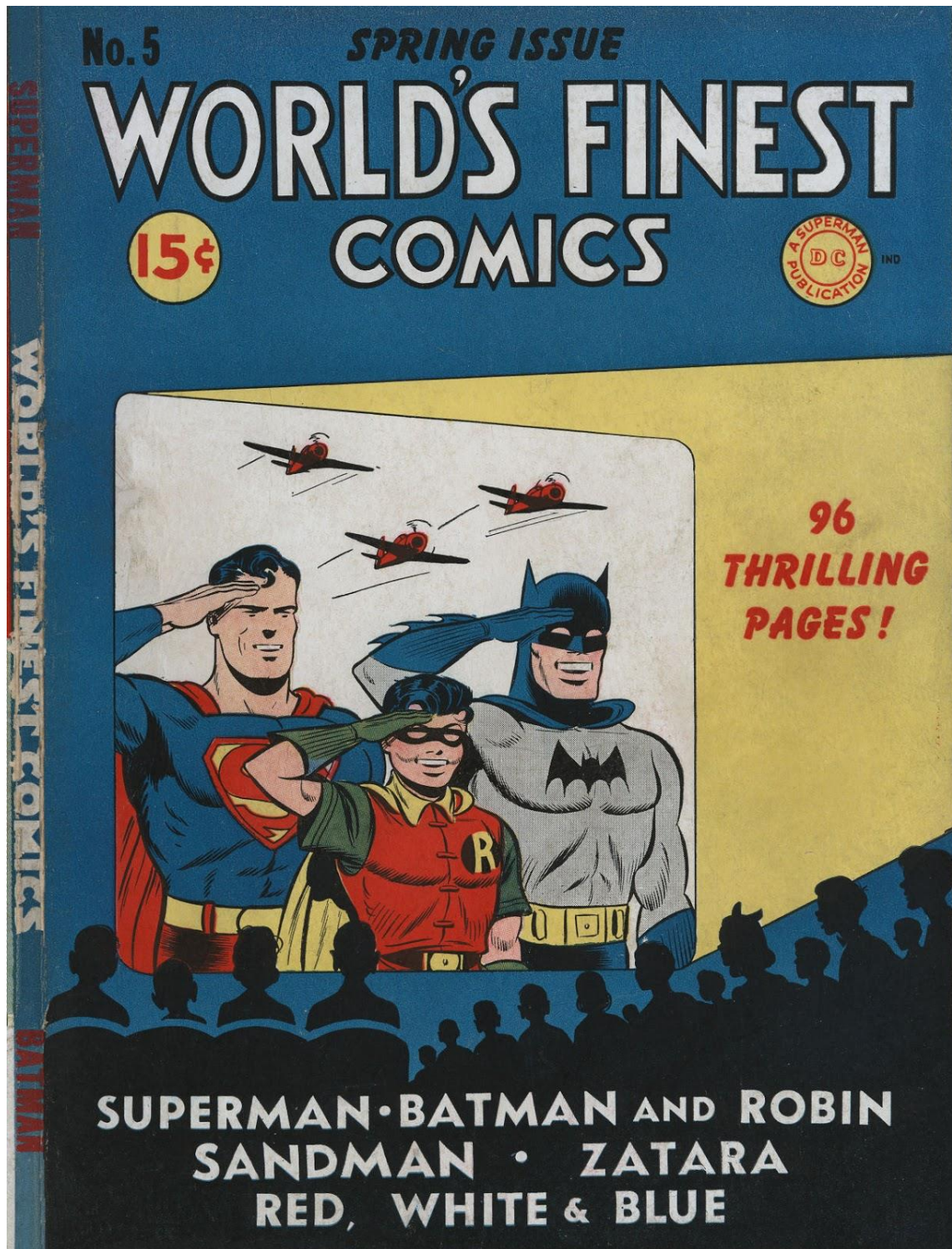
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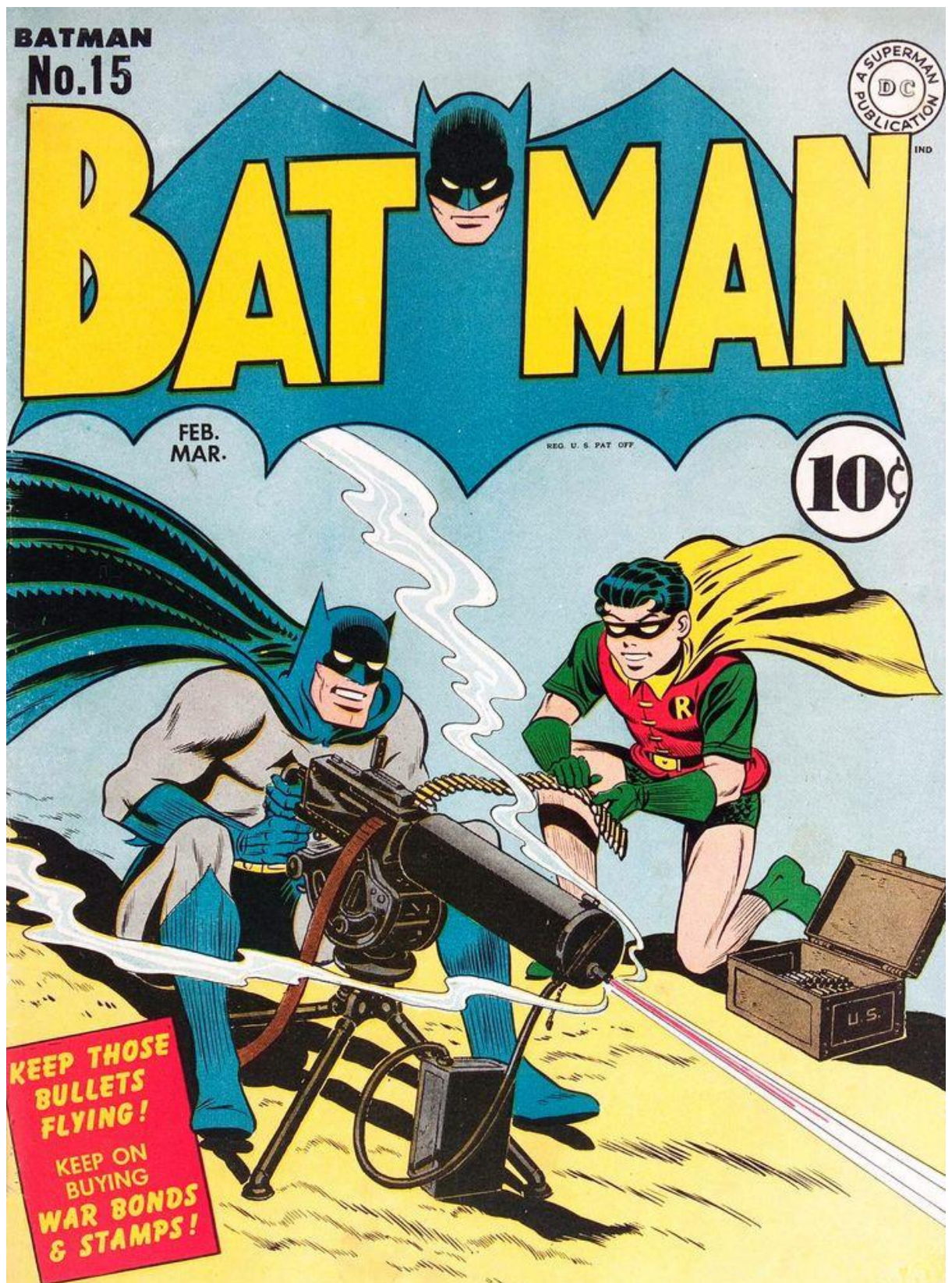
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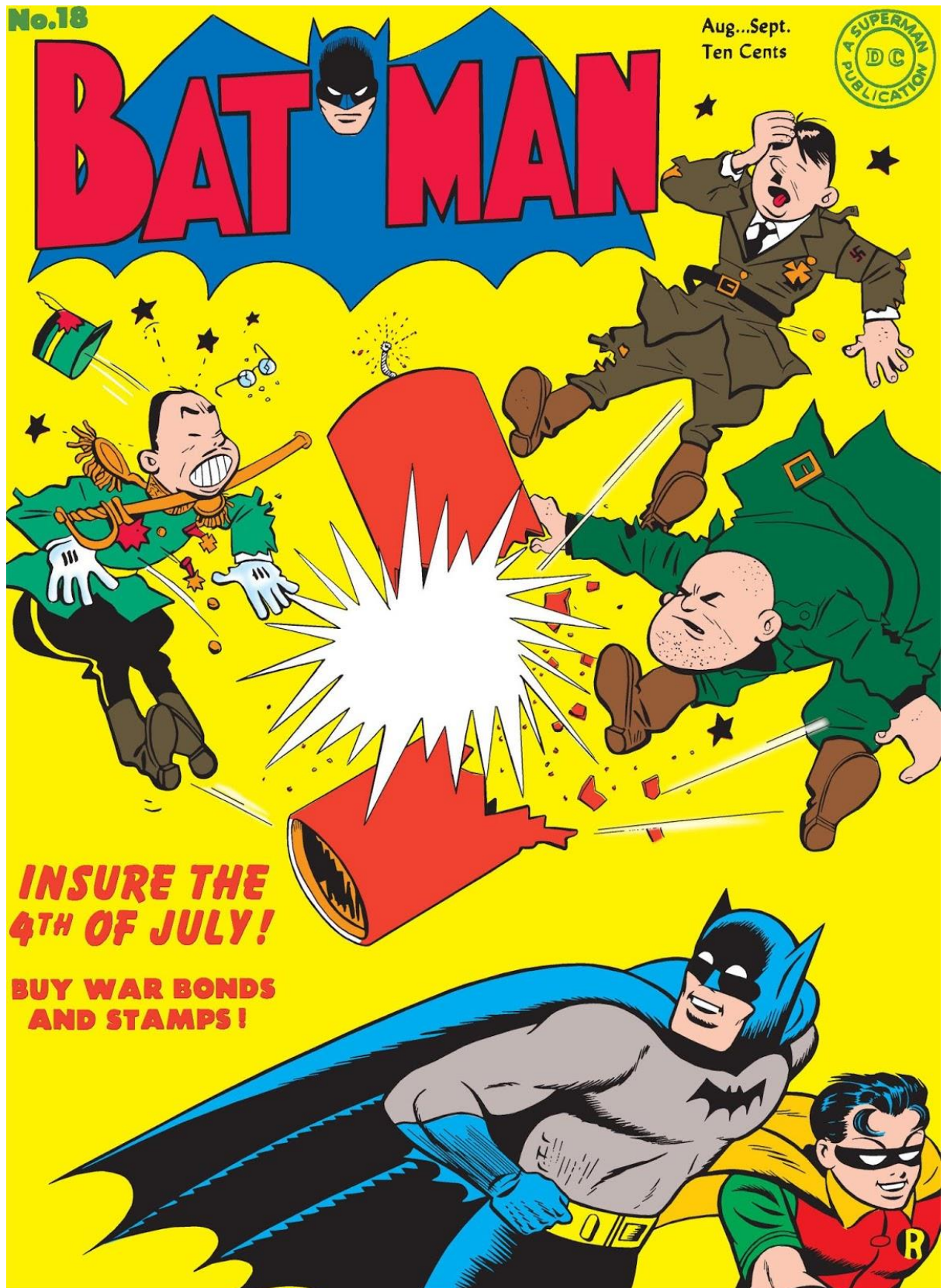


Appendix 3. Propaganda. Batman Comics Issue #15

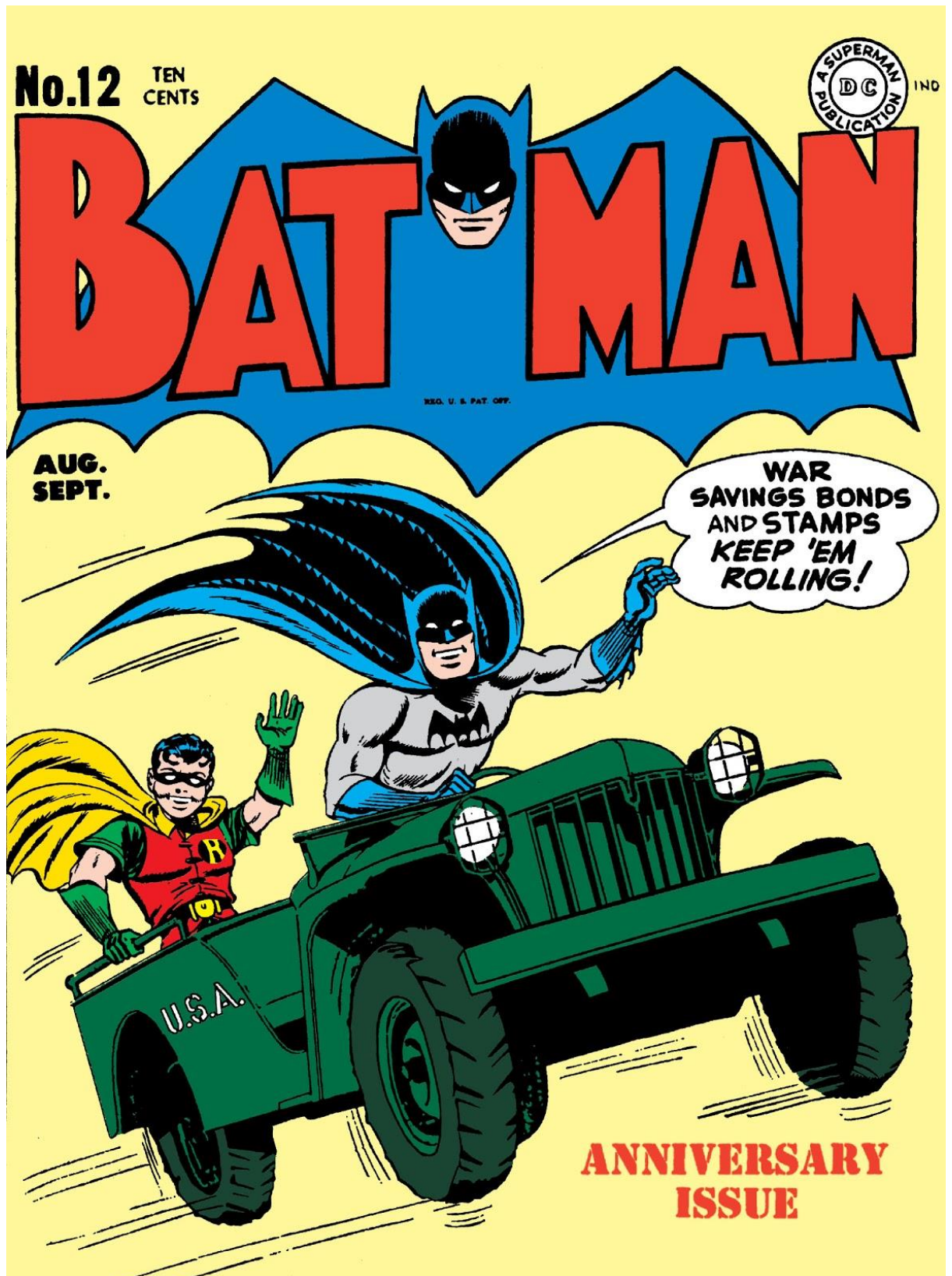


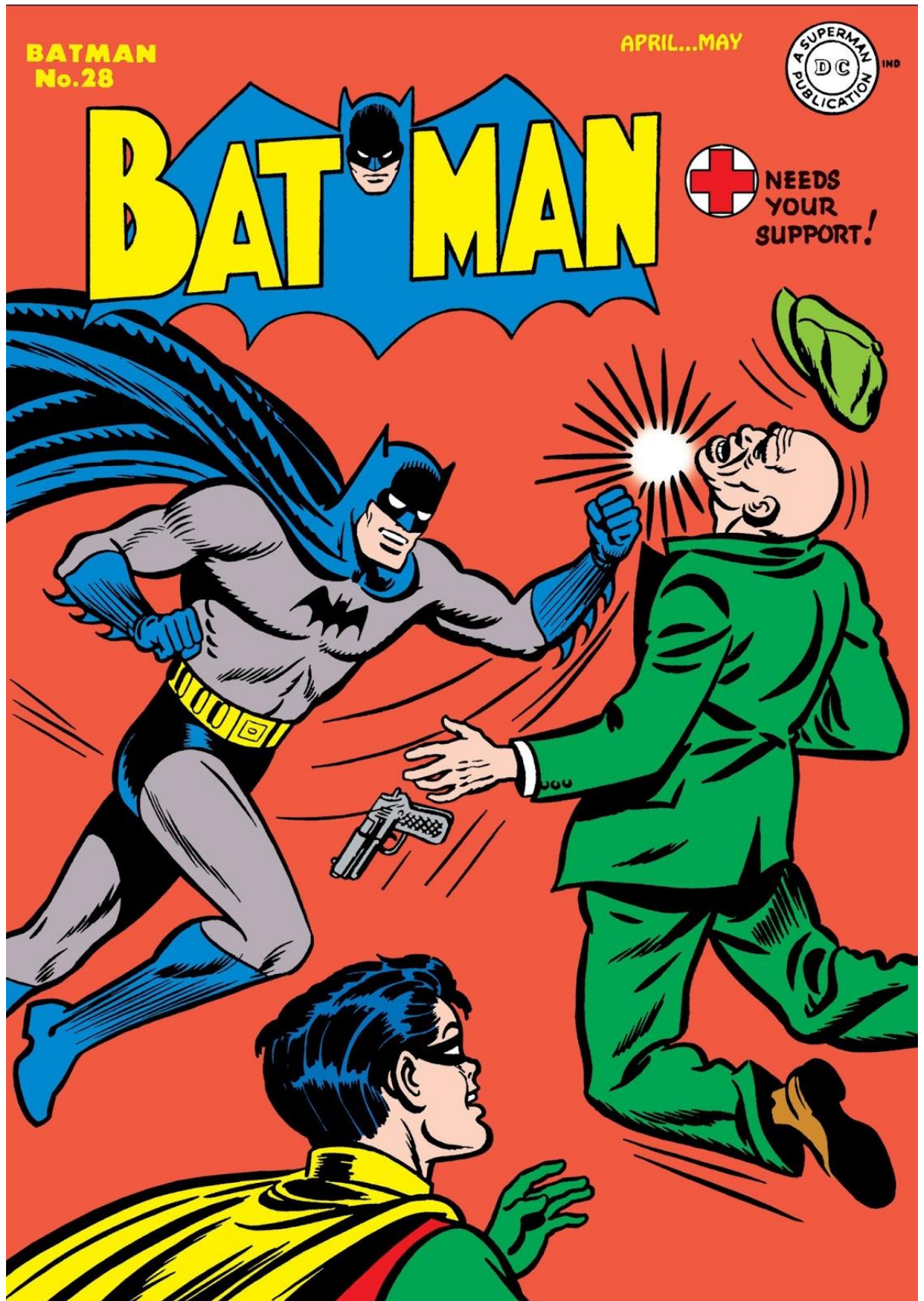












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